

December 31, 2012

From: Deborah S. Bornzin
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Comment regarding the scope of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Gateway Pacific Terminal project proposed for Cherry Point (near Bellingham city) in Whatcom County, WA.
Please include my comments in the public record.

I respectfully request that you include and address thoroughly in your Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) the nine concerns listed below. "Concerns" is really too mild a word, because even contemplating the possibility of impacts from this project, if it gets permitted, is already a source of fear and anxiety for me and my family.

Impacts in Bellingham

1. Delay of first responders. When minutes and even seconds count in emergencies, fire, police, and ambulance services will have to use longer, alternate routes, or wait until train crossings clear. If we have the 18 more trains per day suggested by SSA Marine, the delays will cause loss of life and property.
2. Air pollution. Several in my family suffer from asthma and allergies. I support the concerns of many local physicians who have already testified to the damaging effect increased air particulates will have upon the health of everyone in our city, even increasing the incidence of death from lung disease. Not only people, but pets and wildlife, birds, pollinating bees, and insects will be affected.
 - a. Exhaust from vehicles waiting at railroad crossings. We already have studies that indicate vehicles idling for more than one minute create significantly more pollution than a moving vehicle. Bellingham has several rail crossings and many vehicles would be waiting per day. Sitting in a line-up of idling vehicles directly affects breathing and contributes significantly to overall city air degradation.
 - b. Diesel particulates from train engines. Given that diesel particulates are one of the most damaging for lung health, and with the major increase in the number of trains that would pass through our city daily, we know there will be more illness and premature death as a long-term outcome.
 - c. Coal dust coming from rail cars loaded with coal. Even if SSA Marine claims they will "coat" the coal to reduce dust, we need scientific studies to prove that this coating will be effective for the complete trip the trains will make from other states.
3. Water pollution. The same pollutants that affect air precipitate into water both in Bellingham Bay and Lake Samish. How will this affect fish, shellfish, boating, and swimming?

4. Noise pollution. The stress of increased noise from train whistles and train track noise will affect the health of all those adjacent to the track route and beyond. The effect on sleep, concentration, productivity, and well-being will be significant. This will ripple out to have an economic effect.
5. Economic loss. Delay time for delivery of goods and services waiting at train crossings will result in economic loss for businesses, restaurants, garbage services, food processors, and the marina. Ferry and bus connections for travelers will be impacted.

Near the Cherry Point site

6. Air pollution. Coal dust from emptying and loading coal cars will travel by air to the neighboring areas. People at Pt. Roberts, WA, and locations in Canada have their homes coated with a black, scummy dust from the nearby coal terminals. Whatcom County north and west of Bellingham is a farming community. What will be the effect of this dust on the surrounding farmland, bird migration, and crop- pollinating bees that enable the growth of our most important exports—berries and fruit? Diminishing crop yields could have devastating economic consequences. More importantly, people and animals will breathe the black scummy dust. Please investigate what health effects this will create.
7. Water pollution.
 - a. What negative effects will occur for the herring stocks and seaweed beds off Cherry Point resulting from dock construction, coal dust, ships approaching the docks, fuel leaks, accidental dumping of coal? These stocks are a significant part of our local and export fisheries economy.
 - b. What water degradation will occur from damaged ships in an earthquake, tsunami occurring from an earthquake anywhere on the Pacific “ring of fire,” eruption of Mt. Baker? Even recent history shows these events have a reasonable probability.

Beyond the local area

8. The coal shipped will be burned in China, and their environmental controls are lax or nonexistent compared to ours. The projected amount to be shipped and burned is significant. As we know from past experience, air and water pollutants from Asia travel across the Pacific via both water and air currents. Please research thoroughly the health and economic cost of mercury and other pollutants resulting from the coal burned in China. One of the worst pollutants is mercury, which is very long-lived and is extremely dangerous to humans, animals, aquatic life, birds, pollinating bees and insects. What will be the effect on Whatcom County’s fisheries industry? Indeed, what will be the effect along the entire west coast of North America? We need to study precisely what the costs will be in shortening of life-spans, degradation of health (damage to nervous systems, fetal damage), and economic losses resulting from air, water, and noise pollution.

9. As with Whatcom County, I have the same concerns about the transport of coal across all the other affected states, cities, counties, towns, ranches, farms, and orchards through which the coal trains will travel. I'll mention Seattle in particular, because I have family there and already they are struggling with air pollution and clean-up of Puget Sound.

Concluding remarks

As granting agencies, you cannot perform your practical duties in a moral vacuum. In a democratic society, the will of people affected by change must take precedence over the unbalancing forces of power and money.

When we in the U.S. are trying to move past coal burning in our own country in favor of cleaner and safer energy sources, how can we in conscience send this dirty resource to the Chinese to expose their people—and us—to these dangers?

Yes, we need jobs in Whatcom County, but there is no guarantee that SSA Marine will hire local workers, especially for management positions. Workers will come in from elsewhere, which will put more strain on our public services. Some studies have shown there will be a net economic loss to the County because of this project. I have been unemployed for a year and a half; nevertheless, people here want jobs that contribute to positive productivity, not degradation.

Environmentally, *if all the costs and effects are accounted for*, there can be no gain for Whatcom County. You are charged with investigating these costs and effects. We ask you to give your EIS the widest scope possible. Please, please listen to us. Thank you for your efforts on our behalf.